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## FACT SHEET

February 2007

# Violence Against Women Education Project

Domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are critical issues facing family, criminal, and juvenile courts in California. The Violence Against Women Education Project (VAWEP) is an initiative designed to provide the courts with information, technical assistance, educational materials, and programs on the courts' role in responding to cases involving these issues. VAWEP is a project of the Center for Families, Children & the Courts (CFCC) of the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and is being implemented in collaboration with the AOC Education Division/Center for Judicial Education and Research (CJER). The project is funded by the Governor's Office of Emergency Services (OES) with resources from the federal Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). The project's planning committee, composed of judicial officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys, attorneys with expertise in the field of domestic violence, victim advocates, and other experts, guides the project staff in identifying key training issues and developing appropriate educational programming. Efforts to develop and augment educational events and curricula related to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking are ongoing and are designed to be responsive to the identified needs of California courts.

### Project Goals

#### The goals of VAWEP are to:

- Identify primary educational and informational needs of the courts on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues;
- Initiate new judicial branch educational programming pertaining to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking, including the delivery of regional training events and enhancing existing programming;
- Develop and compile useful information for the courts on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues that relates specifically to California law;

- Institutionalize inclusion of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues in all relevant judicial branch education curricula, programs, and publications;
- Create incentives designed to increase attendance and participation in judicial branch education relating to domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking;
- Increase communication among courts about best practices in domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking cases;
- Provide jurisdiction-specific technical assistance on domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking issues of the greatest importance to local courts; and
- Create educational tools that aid in the administration of justice for self-represented litigants in domestic violence cases.

#### Educational Events and Technical Assistance

##### **Planned events:**

##### **Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses at the Continuing Judicial Studies Program (CJSP) (October 2006 and January 2007)**

VAWEP develops, staffs, and sponsors a series of in-depth courses on domestic violence and sexual assault that are integrated into this showcase program of CJER.

Fall CJSP:                   “Domestic Violence and Family Law”  
                                  “Difficult Custody Cases: Effects of Domestic Violence on Child Development”

These two components are a part of the Family Law Overview course, which is typically taken by judicial officers new to a family law assignment. They include a general discussion of domestic violence and family law and a focus on child development and custody.

Winter CJSP:               “Domestic Violence and Family Law”  
                                  “Difficult Custody Cases: Effects of Domestic Violence on Child Development”  
                                  “Domestic Violence and Immigration in Criminal Cases”  
                                  “Handling Sexual Assault Cases: Pretrial and Trial”

The family law courses are integrated into the Winter Family Law Overview course. The project also offered a comprehensive course on issues of domestic violence and immigration in criminal cases. These issues increasingly affect judicial decisionmaking, the nature of the information presented to the court, and safety issues in criminal domestic violence cases. The course provides a broad overview of the elements of immigration law that may affect decisions in these cases and an understanding of the challenges facing victims of domestic violence as a result of immigration concerns and the status of the parties.

The sexual assault course helps judicial officers become familiar with a unique body of substantive and procedural law pertaining to sexual assault cases that is not necessarily applicable in other criminal cases. The course helps judicial officers understand the dynamics of sexual assault cases, the needs of the victim, and specially mandated accommodations. It emphasizes these key issues and guides the judicial officer through managing a sexual assault case for pretrial and trial purposes.

#### **Domestic Violence and the Courts Regional Meetings (May and June 2007)**

The project is sponsoring three regional Domestic Violence and the Courts meetings to provide local courts with a focused opportunity to address several challenging aspects of domestic violence matters and to evaluate proposals designed to improve practice in critical areas. Courts will gather to share information, assess promising practices, and engage in dialogue about enhancing their own procedures. The meetings, for judicial officers and court staff only, will focus on five main areas: (1) court leadership, (2) DVPA restraining orders, (3) firearms relinquishment, (4) entry of, and access to, restraining orders in the Domestic Violence Restraining Order System (DVROS), and (5) criminal law procedures. In preparation for attending the regional meetings, courts are requested to convene a court meeting to discuss relevant issues and then convene a court-community meeting to get feedback from the community on the issues.

#### **Judicial Institute Trainings (March, April, and May 2007)**

Domestic violence-related courses will be offered in conjunction with other criminal law courses immediately prior to the Traffic Adjudication Institute in March, the Family Law and Juvenile Law Institutes in April, and the Cow County Institute in May. The project also supports courses given at the Family Dispute Resolution (FDR) Statewide Conference in April. These Judicial Institute trainings and educational events provide information specific to target audiences. For example, the Cow County Institute is specifically designed for rural judges, and the Family Law Institute is for judicial officers assigned to family law cases. Courses will focus on the following subject areas:

“Criminal Domestic Violence” (March Institute)

“Domestic Violence and Juvenile Cases” (May Rural Courts Institute)

“Criminal Sexual Assault” (May Rural Courts Institute)

“Best Practices in Restraining Order Proceedings” (April Family Law Institute)

“Domestic Violence and Child Custody Orders” (April FDR Statewide Conference)

“Domestic Violence and Military Families” (April FDR Statewide Conference)

“Domestic Violence in Dependency Cases” (April Juvenile Law Institute)

**Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Courses, Judicial College (June 2007)**

Courses on issues of both domestic violence and sexual assault will be delivered as part of the nationally recognized B. E. Witkin Judicial College of California, a program providing comprehensive education for all new superior court judges, commissioners, and referees. The courses provide background information on domestic violence and guidance for judicial decisionmaking in sexual assault cases.

**2007 Statewide Judicial Education Conference (September 2007)**

VAWEP will offer a series of workshops on issues of domestic violence and ethics, stalking in cyberspace, ensuring success of batter intervention programs, effects of domestic violence on kids, and sexually violent predators. This conference will be attended by a large number of judicial officers in the state, who can elect to attend these specific workshops as part of a larger event. The workshops will be attended by individual judges who might not usually have access to educational programs on these important domestic violence-related issues.

**Domestic Violence Safety Partnership Program (Ongoing in 2007)**

Under the auspices of the Domestic Violence Safety Partnership (DVSP) project, VAWEP provides targeted, local technical assistance to applicant courts that have an identified need for training. DVSP distributes a self-assessment tool that enumerates required procedures and recommended practices and provides training and technical assistance based on the issues identified. In the past, VAWEP has received many requests from courts about specific information needs, which can range from understanding warning signs for lethality in domestic violence cases to improving communication between the many types of courts that may be involved in a particular case. The project provides experts whose specialties vary based on the need of the specific court. This assistance is accomplished by delivering a substantive expert to speak to the issues at hand, providing speakers with expertise in issues related to violence against women at AOC trainings, or facilitating a peer-mentoring meeting in which courts come together to learn about individual best practices. Recipients of this assistance are asked to evaluate what they have received.

## Curriculum Development and Publications

### **VAWEP distributes the following curricula, publications, and other resource materials:**

#### **Judges Guide to Domestic Violence Cases—Revised 2007**

VAWEP updates the judges' guide as needed. This practical judges' handbook covers the following components:

- California Protective Orders
- Emergency Protective Order (EPO) Quick Reference Guide
- Firearms and Full Faith and Credit
- Immigration and Domestic Violence
- Stalking

The five components of this guide have been consolidated into one volume for easy reference and accessibility. They can also be used separately and are updated separately. Each component focuses on the information, case law, and statutes that judicial officers need to know in the relevant subject area. Revisions to any component of the guide will be posted on a Web site designed for judicial officers.

#### **Online Training Programs**

The project proposes to develop online training courses for bench officers and court staff to improve the handling of domestic violence cases. The courses will include a variety of instructional materials and online delivery methods. Topics areas may include processing restraining orders, criminal procedures or ethical standards for court interpreters.

#### **Domestic Violence Newsletter**

The project plans to develop a newsletter to disseminate to all judicial officers on current information about domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. The newsletter will include information on new laws and forms, pending legislation, recommended best practices, and a calendar of educational events. The newsletter will give readers up-to-date information regarding domestic violence issues in California.

#### **Annual Report and Fact Sheet**

Project staff develops an updated annual report and this fact sheet that highlight key efforts the project has undertaken as well as judicial and court responses to those efforts. These documents are distributed to provide project information to judicial branch professionals and the public. As educational tools, they highlight suggested practices and innovative approaches.

Further Information

For additional information about VAWEP activities, please contact:

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